

“nation, relative to the explorations which are going on in the Colony:—

“ ‘ We are continuing the explorations, in which the Geographical Society has taken so much interest. Lieutenant PRUD’HOMME left last Monday for Sambor on the ‘ Upper Mekong.’ He is to take observations for the line of a tramway protected from inundation, and, at the same time, to determine the height of the banks of the river above and below the rapids.

“ ‘ Lieutenant GAUTIER is *en route* for Tracona, on the frontier of Baik Ihuau, in the neighbourhood of Tanbinh. He will remain in these almost unknown regions so long as his health permits him to do so, and will permanently establish himself.

“ ‘ Mons. PAVIE has finished placing the telegraphic posts between Prom-Penh and Battambang. The wires are fixed on the Cambogian side. We are only waiting for the Siamese to open this important line of electric communication.

“ ‘ Mons. AYMONIER and Captain SORIN remain at Angkor; by the last news, their health left nothing to desire.”

“ It is fitting here,” adds the general Secretary, “ to thank Mons. LE MYRE DE VILERS who is always so ready to help the Society.”

#### MALAY transliteration.

A Member of the Straits Asiatic Society, who was also one of the Government Spelling Committee (1878), has furnished the following Memorandum relative to the Paper on Transliteration, which appeared in the last Journal:—

It may be interesting to define the exact difference between the “spelling system” adopted by the Government Committee (1878) and published in Journal No. I., and that recommended in the paper now published. Both systems adopt the same course in giving the vowel sounds their Italian value, and, generally speaking, in regard to diphthongs and consonants. Nor in regard to separating the consonants in agglutinative particles and doubling the consonants in Arabic words having the *tashdid*, are the two systems in any way opposed. The difference between them is almost entirely limited to two points: one as to the principle of proceeding when sound and spelling differ; and one as to the mode

of getting over that crucial test—the open semi-vowel sound, so much more common in Malay than in English. Both of these points are treated briefly by the Committee under paragraphs 3 and 6 of their Report (containing 17 paragraphs altogether) and the differences between the two methods are really summed up in the following statements:—

*a.* The Committee considers that (paragraph 3) “in Malay as in Chinese it is *sounds* and not *letters* that have to be represented.”

The critic considers that (page 142) “there are two objects to be kept in view: 1st to obtain a faithful transliteration of the Malay character; and 2nd to clothe the words in such a form that they may be pronounced correctly by an English reader.”

*b.* The Committee considers (paragraph 6) that as to the open semi-vowel sound (which the critic refers to as the sound which can only be expressed in Arabic writing by the *fathah*) “no natural representative suggests itself, and that there will be the least danger of misunderstanding if this sound be uniformly expressed by the letter *ě*, sound as in ‘lateral’ ‘considerable’”—*e* unmarked being devoted to the ordinary English sound as in Ten (English), Sendok (Malay).

The critic proposes (page 147) that *a* or *e* unmarked shall correspond with *fathah*; and as to the ordinary English sound as in Sendok he omits to deal with it altogether.

A good deal of his paper deals very ably with philological questions, which lead him not only beyond the ground covered by our Report, but even beyond the principles of his own spelling system, as for example when he suggests:—

For	{	Sžmbilan (by our system)	} Sambilan to mark its probable derivation from Sa-ambil-an (1).
		Sembilan,	
		or Sambilan } (by his system)	

(1) As these sheets pass through my hands, I take the opportunity of adding a note or two. The word quoted is سَمْبِيلَان. This, according to the system I proposed, may be rendered *sambilan* or *sembilan*, but the first is obviously correct, as shewn by the derivation. *Sa* is more generally correct than *se*, in Malay, for the reason I have given.

It is only necessary to say in regard to this, that the Committee was appointed to procure uniformity in spelling, and that their system was only recommended to the Society's contributors for that end, (1) and by no means for the purpose of promoting philological study; and no spelling system can properly be gauged by any test of that kind. It may not be beside the point to remark further that the parent Asiatic Society also published, in the first number of its "*Researches*" (1784), a system of transliteration by Sir W. JONES, the general principles of which have more and more recommended themselves to the best judges, whether in Europe or India. It is confidently asserted that the Committee's system followed those principles much more nearly than their critic's system does, both in adopting "a specific symbol for every sound," and in making use of "the help of diacritical marks."

It is, of course, impossible to know when the last word on any subject has been said, but it will be a pity if the ingenious but too fantastic suggestions of this latest writer should be hastily taken for the "last word" by any of the general contributors to our Journal. The system settled in 1878 has now been tried for some years and has been found already of practical advantage—chiefly because it has been looked upon as a *settled* system. (2)

---

(1) I do not admit that a system of spelling should be recommended to the Society simply because it proposes to establish uniformity. A thoroughly bad system might nevertheless be uniformly followed if every one were content. But *uniformity* has not been attained and cannot be attained when each one has to decide by his ear whether he shall write *â, u, ô* or *o; î, i, ê* or *e; and so on.* The member who takes up the cudgels on behalf of the Committee unintentionally affords me an excellent illustration of this. He quotes the words *sendok*, the first syllable of which is said to be pronounced like the English word *ten*. Now this word (*senduk*) was quoted by me (p. 145) as an example of the indefinite vowel-sound common in Malay and was said to be pronounced *s'nduk*. Without arguing the question as to which is correct, I ask how uniformity in spelling is to be expected when men are to be guided by pronunciation which varies in different localities and for which there is no recognised standard? Uniformity is an illusion and the sooner the idea is given up the better. What I have proposed is that *a* or *e, i* or *e, and u* or *o*, shall be equally correct provided that the Malay mode of writing and recognised derivations are not departed from.

(2) This seems to me to beg the question. The *settled* condition claimed for the Government system, will be disproved in five minutes by any one who will take up the Government Blue-book or other publications.